

Bunny, chick pets a bad Easter idea; stick with chocolate

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By Justin Mason

CAPITAL REGION — About a month after Easter each year, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals starts receiving distressed phone calls about pet rabbits that have become a problem.

Bunnies that were purchased on impulse quickly grow into rabbits that need constant care and attention. This kind of commitment is often overlooked by the purchaser until the rabbit becomes aggressive or skittish, and then it's a scramble to find out how to dispose of the animal.

"We get a lot of calls from people in the community," said Windy Wyczawski, a spokeswoman for the Schenectady, Schoharie and Saratoga Counties SPCA. "There's this kind of aftermath following Easter."

With the Easter holiday coming up this weekend, the SPCA is urging people to refrain from impulsive animal purchases. While ducklings, chicks and bunnies all may seem like fitting things to place in a child's Easter basket, they're also living creatures that often require a significant investment long after the holiday has passed.

As a result, Wyczawski said, roughly 60 percent of all animals purchased around Easter end up at a shelter or worse. Sometimes, unwanted animals are simply released into the wild, where they seldom stand a chance of surviving.

"Impulse buying is never any good for an animal," she said. "But this just comes up every Easter."

Wyczawski said rabbits are the most common animal purchased for Easter and are often the worst match for a young child. Without almost constant human contact, they can become skittish or aggressive.

With a life span of up to a decade, rabbits also require their nails to be trimmed regularly and chew toys. Without the necessary toys or care, Wyczawski said the animals can become extremely destructive.

"Stick with chocolate bunnies," she said. "Stay away from the live ones."

Chicks and ducklings are also a poor mix with children. Stress and handling related injuries often spell death for the birds several weeks after the holiday.

Those birds that live require special housing with a constant heat source. Wyczawski said they can also carry diseases like salmonella and other bacteria, which can cause serious illness.

“People, especially children, can be exposed to the bacteria by holding, cuddling or kissing birds,” she said.

Spokeswoman Marguerite Pearson said the Animal Protective Foundation in Glenville didn’t see many abandoned animals after last Easter. She hopes that’s a sign pet owners are thinking a bit longer before buying an animal on a holiday whim.

“Maybe the trend is changing a little bit and people are realizing this is probably not a good idea,” she said.